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Nimmie-Caira – a giant win for nature, the local economy and Indigenous reconnection to country

A consortium led by The Nature Conservancy is honoured to have been chosen as the successful proponent for the future stewardship of Nimmie-Caira – 85,000 hectares of important, internationally significant Murrumbidgee floodplain in southern NSW. This represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a new, sustainably managed and financed conservation property for the benefit of people and nature.

“We’re thrilled that our vision to support the area’s outstanding biodiversity and Aboriginal cultural values while demonstrating exemplary agricultural production, education and scientific research, is shared by the NSW government,” said Rich Gilmore, Country Director for The Nature Conservancy in Australia, speaking on behalf of the consortium. The other members of the consortium are the Nari Nari Tribal Council, the Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group and the Centre for Ecosystem Science at the University of NSW.

The future management of the property will focus on three main areas of equal importance¹:

- **Environmental protection** - Proceeds of the commercial activities will be reinvested into environmental works on Nimmie-Caira. Important natural habitats on the property including extensive wetlands of Lignum, River Red Gum forests, lakes and floodplains will be enhanced and protected. This includes habitats for threatened animals and plants like the Australasian Bittern, Australian Painted-snipe, Southern Bell Frog and Mossgiel Daisy.
- **Indigenous engagement and participation** – Nari Nari Tribal Council will play a critical role in the management of the property, providing outstanding opportunities for Indigenous employment, improved health, education and reconnection to country.
- **Sustainable development** - A diversified range of commercial activities that will boost the local economy and provide ongoing employment in the region around Hay and Balranald, NSW. These activities will include sustainable, low impact grazing and tourism as well as other potential activities like carbon farming on parts of the property previously used for agriculture.

The Nature Conservancy-led consortium is delighted to be able to implement its innovative plan for the future management of Nimmie-Caira, the largest remaining area of wetlands in the Murrumbidgee Valley. This represents a significant project in efforts to restore one of the more important wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin.

“We’re very keen to commence management of Nimmie-Caira so that the multiple benefits for people and nature in the area can be realised,” concluded Gilmore.

The Nature Conservancy is a global conservation organisation dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we focus on getting things done efficiently and with the greatest positive impact for conservation. We’re a trusted organisation working in 72 countries on innovative solutions to our world’s toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We’re tackling climate change, conserving lands, waters and oceans at unprecedented scale, providing food and water sustainably and helping make cities more sustainable. To learn more about The Nature Conservancy in Australia, visit our [website](#) or follow us on [Facebook](#).

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¹ See attached fact sheet for further details.

Nimmie-Caira Project

Fact sheet

Natural values

Nimmie-Caira is part of the Lowbidgee floodplain, the largest remaining area of wetlands in the Murrumbidgee Valley within the southern Murray Darling Basin. This floodplain and its associated wetlands systems are areas of national and international significance. They provide feeding and breeding habitat for many waterbird species, including colonially breeding water birds and migratory species, listed under international agreements, rare and endangered frogs and birds, as well as threatened plants.

The key vegetation communities identified on Nimmie-Caira include:

- Lignum shrublands
- River Red Gum forests and woodlands
- Black Box woodlands
- Mid-floodplain shrublands (inundation tolerant)
- High floodplain shrublands
- Aeolian rise shrublands and woodlands
- Marshes and sedgeland

Hydrological features include natural river and creek channels, natural quaternary lakes (deflation basins) and irrigation channels. Although some of these features are man-made and have disrupted natural flow regimes, they provide unique opportunities to restore the previously magnificent wetland ecosystems and their dependent biota and in some places, ensure connectivity between dryland areas and the floodplain.

While around half of the property was previously used for cropping and grazing, the majority of it remains covered with significant native vegetation in good or recovering condition.

The natural features of the property are the key to understanding and protecting the cultural values of Nimmie-Caira. Aboriginal people will be back on their own country and designing programs to ensure significant employment and health and wellbeing outcomes.

The natural features will also be a key driver of research and education programs with significant capacity to study and learn from our management activities, particularly in relation to environmental flow management.

Cultural values

The entire Nimmie-Caira area is a rich cultural landscape supporting many Aboriginal people as evidenced by its cultural features, particularly the burial mounds and camp sites along with other significant cultural values. There is evidence that Aboriginal people used targeted interventions to promote the productivity of regions like Nimmie-Caira, promoting fish, bird and vegetation growth.

Aboriginal land ownership and management is a key outcome of the consortium bid as evidence has shown that this delivers the best environmental, social and economic outcomes.

All core partners have significant experience building capacity for Aboriginal organisations.



Australian Pelicans © Toni Moran



Plumed Whistling Ducks © Janette Rodgers

We are able to draw on a strong networks of advisors we have built to deliver integrated sustainability outcomes and to provide access for peer learning from Aboriginal organisations around the following:

- effective governance
- financing
- land and water management
- monitoring and data management/Knowledge systems
- adaptive planning and evaluation

Economic values

Nimmie-Caira's economic values stem from a range of anticipated commercial activities including:

- **Sustainable low-impact grazing** - We will demonstrate exemplary food production in balance with nature, through responsible low-impact grazing and, when appropriate, opportunistic cropping. It is anticipated that responsible low-impact grazing will be the primary driver of income while the property transitions over time to a more balanced nature- and culture-based economy. We propose that at the end of the first 10 years up to 50-70% of the property will be grazed with the balance reserved for conservation.
- **Carbon farming** - We will develop a new carbon sequestration methodology to generate verified Australian Carbon Credit Units, able to be traded through the Emissions Reduction Fund.
- **Education** - We will establish the Nimmie-Caira Centre for Two-Way Learning in partnership with a leading university to share traditional ecological knowledge and western science, bridge Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures and generate income from course participation and visitation.
- **Ecotourism** - We will build a world-class environmental and cultural visitor experience catering for private guests as well as volunteer and educational groups.
- **Biodiversity credits** - Biodiversity payments will be investigated.

A number of other non-commercial activities are also anticipated including:

- Undertake large-scale restoration of Lignum, River Red Gum, Black Box and other wetland ecological communities.
- On-ground land and water management – e.g. managing fire, weeds, feral animals, salinity and threatened species to protect and maintain assets.
- Monitoring and evaluation.
- Undertake world-leading research on the restoration of aquatic ecosystems, using a strategic adaptive management approach.
- Increased legal protection of environmental and cultural assets through options that may include declaration of an Indigenous Protected Area, negotiation of in perpetuity protection agreements and/or nomination for listing as a Ramsar site under The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.
- Cultural heritage site assessment and management to protect and maintain assets.
- Leveraging 20 years' experience in wetland and water management by partnering with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and the NSW Government to re-establish best practice environmental watering.
- Infrastructure upgrades and maintenance to enable grazing activities and protect and maintain cultural and environmental assets.



Black-winged Stilts © Ann Killeen